Content Strategy for Venture Vortex.com v2.0 Establish

prepared for VentureVortex October 27, 2000



This content strategy for the 2.0 version of the VentureVortex.com site addresses content development, management, and deployment, with the following objectives:

- Create a targeted experience for Venture Vortex community members.
- Maximize efficiency in integrating content from multiple sources.
- Protect the Venture Vortex brand.

Defining and following a content strategy will help to create a personal experience by both disciplining the voice of the web site and, even more importantly, enabling personalization through user profiling. This reinforces the idea that Venture Vortex truly knows and understands each and every user of the site.

Applying a content strategy promotes efficiency by developing automation and workflow processes to handle large volumes of content coming from multiple sources, reviewed and approved by various people, and staged, posted, and refreshed on multiple cycles.

It is critical that the content strategy protects the brand by maintaining the quality of content and by keeping content fresh and relevant (an all-important credibility issue on the Web). In addition, it must reinforce the authority and expertise that is characteristic of the Venture Vortex community.

Taking into consideration the existing site, the content strategy mission statements created by Venture Vortex for versions 1.0 and 2.0, and the goals, standards, and intentions provided for the 2.0 version, this document makes recommendations addressing a number of content issues:

- The voice and tone of the written content at the Venture Vortex site should communicate the personality of the community and of the site provider.
- The types of content and methods required for their development, including roles, responsibilities, and techniques for developing content while sticking to editorial rollout schedules.
- The business and workflow guidelines that govern the requirements for a content
 administration tool to manage the process of developing, maintaining, and
 refreshing the different types of content at the Venture Vortex 2.0 site.
- The tutorials, help files, and other supporting documents used to communicate
 best practices to incubators and provide them with eRoom content-administration
 guidelines for their private label sites. (Venture Vortex will supply incubators
 with basic site content and will administer any customized content required by
 incubators.)

First Principles

Several guiding principles have been communicated by Venture Vortex, both through the provision or citation of documents and through the efforts represented at the existing site.

From the beginning, Venture Vortex has been positioned as a content-rich site with an interactive community and a great deal of user-created content. Version 1.0 of the site takes some giant steps toward realizing the ultimate vision of the Vortex as a community of communities, and version 2.0 should bring the site much closer to that goal.

to all the site

Version 1.0 Content Strategy Statement

Here are a few of the salient points from the content strategy statement for VentureVortex.com 1.0:

- The tone of content at the site conveys "experienced; been there. Tone is "opinionated, with attitude; aggressive, but with a sense of humor." The voice of the site says, "We're on your side. We can help." Venture Vortex helps entrepreneurs start a business and find partners by demystifying the process and offering guidelines and a Roadmap. At the same time, Venture Vortex helps investors find companies to invest in by providing effective tools for accessing and searching the community.
- Venture Vortex's mission is to "educate, execute, interact." In version 1.0, this is
 accomplished through news and articles, the Roadmap, and message boards and some
 basic collaborative tools.
- All content is mapped to the 13 steps of the Roadmap (the core app of version 1.0) to guide the user through the venture-building process.
- The goal is to create a dynamic, self-sustaining vortex.

Version 2.0 Content Strategy Statement

The content strategy statement Venture Vortex provided for version 2.0 raises the bar, expecting more from the content at the site, as summarized here:

- Venture Vortex must become a "community of communities" (also known as a business web or "e-business community").
- There will be new types of users (primarily incubators and institutional investors)
- Venture Vortex must take care to maintain the high quality of its content as the site scales up, and both encourage (by recommending best practices) and enable (by providing tutorials and help documents) incubators to maintain a high level of content quality in their private labels sites.
- The site will provide specialized content (through user profiling) on the basis of "regionalization," the private-label offering, and possibly other subcommunities.
- Venture Vortex will continue to add useful "educational" information, in the form of newsletters and tutorials.
- There will be new (and region-specific) content for the Roadmap.
- Venture Vortex is establishing an international presence through alliances, which will accelerate the scaling-up of content.
- Version 2.0 will require better tools to manage content, including the ability to
 archive content for later repurposing. With these tools, Venture Vortex site
 administrators will be able to archive older articles and newsletters, develop FAQs,
 and otherwise analyze user involvement at the site. Finally, management of content
 should be independent of site code and structure.
- User-created content will become all the more important as the site's user base grows. In order to cross-pollinate and make the most effective use of this source of

content, Venture Vortex requires the ability to collect, promote, and deploy user-created content:

- The admin tool will include an archive function.
- There will be no automated tools for cross-posting content (such as for a "quote of the day" feature drawn from community message boards), but Venture Vortex personnel will be able to use the admin tool to copy any content and paste it into any other internally generated content area.
- Where possible, Venture Vortex should improve the quality of help, tutorials, instructions, and other static copy. (Above all, content should be concise).
- The tone must now appeal to a wider audience, slightly more mainstream but still savvy. No fluff!

Venture Vortex as Business Web (After "Digital Capital")

Venture Vortex principals have also cited the book Digital Capital: Harnessing the Power of Business Webs (Harvard Business School Press, 2000) and the vision of business webs it extols as a benchmark for the evolution of the site. The concepts brought to light in that book bear upon the content strategy for version 2.0 of the site:

- Venture Vortex must be the "context provider" for its communities: "The context
 provider manages customer relationships and choreographs the value-creating
 activities of the entire system. Such b-web leaders get the captain's share of the
 spoils."
- The Vortex makes use of multiple "content providers" (including Venture Vortex administrators themselves, users, syndicates, and partners): "Content providers design, make, and deliver the 'intrinsic' forms of value—goods, services, or information—that satisfy customer needs." (Note that this is a slightly different definition of the content from the one generally used in this document—it includes services and goods, which would make the affiliates on the Roadmap content providers as well, for example.)
- Of the five business web models cited in the book, Venture Vortex most closely fits the Alliance model:
 - · main theme: creativity
 - value proposition: creative collaboration in aid of a goal shared across a community of contributors
 - customer role: contributor
 - knowledge focus: community, creativity, standards and roles
 - key process: innovation

Venture Vortex shares some features with the other models mentioned as well:

Agora—Venture Vortex enables dynamic pricing, its users can be considered
market players, the knowledge focus does involve timing and market intelligence,
but its key process isn't price discovery and its value proposition doesn't depend on

liquidity. The closest example sites in this category would be Yahoo! Classifieds and eBay.

- Aggregator—Venture Vortex does use needs matching as a key process and its
 customers could be considered buyers, but its main theme isn't selection and
 convenience, it doesn't optimize matching and fulfillment (at least not by version 2.0),
 nor is its knowledge focus market segmentation, supplier offerings, or fulfillment. The
 closest matches among the examples sites would be Amazon.com, E*Trade, and
 Travelocity. (The Roadmap feature at Venture Vortex does function as something of
 an aggregator.)
- Value Chain—Venture Vortex does design and deliver an integrated product or service that meets a specific set of customer needs (if we consider the venture builder/plan builder and incubator dashboard/private-label function to be products or product/service hybrids), but its main theme isn't process integration. And even if that is a subtheme, its customer role is only partly that of value driver. Its knowledge focus does include innovation but not supply-chain management, and its key processes are neither product design (aside from the "productization" of its offerings) nor, again, supply-chain management. None of the example sites are a close match to Venture Vortex.
- Distributive Network—Venture Vortex does facilitate the exchange and delivery of information, goods, and services; its customer role can be considered that of sender or recipient. Its knowledge focus is partly that of network optimization but the relationship to visibility and transparency are more nuanced (given the necessity of balancing the interests of entrepreneurs and investors). Venture Vortex's main theme is neither allocation nor distribution, its key process is not distribution, and none of the examples fit all that well.

The lessons to be abstracted from all of these yardsticks are:

- 1. Cultivate an active, collaborative, engaged community.
- 2. Function as the referee in a marketplace while allowing market pressures to sort out the buyers and sellers.
- 3. Help facilitate needs matching to maximize the value of the community to its members.
- 4. Treat the site's offerings as products or product/service hybrids, paying utmost attention to the needs of the paying customers.
- 5. Encourage the exchange of information and services.

Naturally, only some of these suggestions directly bear on content development or management (mostly through the avenue of encouraging preferred types of behavior through explanatory copy, help text, and tutorials.

Existing Content Processes

Venture Vortex has developed a content-rich site in a very short amount of time, and much of the content at the existing site will feature in the new version. Because the 2.0 site will be built around this core content, a brief review of the existing content processes is in order. (See the Venture Vortex 1.0 High Level Content Inventory completed by Henry Harvey for an overview of the major categories, storage methods, creators, and refresh cycles in the existing site.)

Content Providers

Currently content is provided by multiple sources:

- Venture Vortex.
- Partners such as the Kaufman and Lowe foundations (in col'aboration with Venture Vortex). Ventre Buller
- Users at the message boards.
- · A syndicator (Screaming Media). Note that Venture Vortex is reconsidering the relationship with Screanjing Media and may need to substitute a different but comparable syndicator. (A change of content syndicator will require additional time to integrate the new content provider into the site. Groundswell will prepare some comparative material to help Venture Vortex decide about whether to change providers and if so, how to choose a new provider.
- Affiliated companies (in the Roadmap section).

Editorial Roles & Responsibilities

The body copy for the first release of the site and the subsequent updates has been generated by Venture Vortex management (primarily Garnet Heramen and Henry Harvey), with no formal editorial roles defined. Body copy (including welcome messages, taglines, FAQs, etc.) has been created by Garnet Heramen, Henry Harvey, Irene Tata, and to some extent by staff from Market Research/Marketing. Additional user instructions and interactive screen text was created by developer Tim Lieberman.

Approval

Freelance moderators monitor the message boards. For the most part, all partner-related copy has been reviewed and approved by Irene Tata, and all other site copy has been reviewed and approved by Garnet Heramen. Some content requires approval from third parties, such as partners. For example, content in the Venture Builder newsletter requires approval from the Lowe Foundation. As discussed elsewhere in this document, all workflow (in the form of notification or seeking external approval) will take place offline for the version 2.0 site.

Third-Party Sources

Currently, two partners and one syndicator provide content for the site, subject to the review and approval of Henry Harvey.

Maintaining the Integrity of the Venture Vortex Brand

The close control of copy has disciplined the brand, thus far, successfully communicating "hipness" and respect for the user (with some room for improvement in the now-ramshackle user interface).

Editorial Board or Committee

The editorial stakeholders are as yet too few to justify the establishment of a supervisory board.

Maintenance Plan

Maintenance is managed ad hoc, through multiple inconsistent admin tools, forcing Henry Harvey to maintain too much of the site manually, without a convenient way to delegate routine tasks.

Recommended Strategies

The Venture Vortex team must establish content strategies—and then follow them carefully—in order to rapidly develop new and revise repurposed content while constructing useful admin tools for the 2.0 site. These strategies must address everything from the structure of information to the specific copy a particular type of user will see. Of course, the market and the community itself will influence the strategies during future revisions.

The content-related issues that require strategic focus are the following:

- Information Architecture—Structuring the content to serve the users' needs
- Content Sources— Blending multiple providers to maintain vital content for users
- Content Development— Streamlining the editorial workflow
- · Content Management— Defining simple, efficient tools for updating content
- Content Deployment— Profiling users to deliver content targeted to their demographics

Information Architecture

The information architecture for Venture Vortex's version 2.0 site must be built around a database designed to maximize the value for the primary class of paying customers (the Incubators). At the same time it must also present information to all community members that will serve their needs and that fits their profiles.

The information architecture largely depends upon the technical architecture, and its implementation comes through the user interface (and choice and placement of content). The content strategist will collaborate with the technical lead and UI strategist to synchronize these interdependent efforts.

The 2.0 site will incorporate several different search functions (for Venture Partners, for rated plans, for ventures). Therefore, the data structure should be tailored to accommodate the search queries that will be required to implement these functions. The data structure will also have to support the profiling of a sufficient number of distinct user-profile levels (or other defining characteristics, such as "regioni") in order to deliver targeted content.

Content Sources

Venture Vortex has already established a rich and diverse mix of content sources relevant to its community, and is taking steps in advance of the 2.0 build to add new content (such as newsletters, as itemized in the high-level content inventory). As the site grows, its vigor will depend increasingly on user-contributed content. Influential contributors to message boards could be spotlighted (or offered a "column"). For example, lively conversations could be showcased at the public site (the way the WELL promotes interesting conversations and guest speakers with its publicly readable Inkwell.vue forum). Additional efforts should be considered to encourage Venture Partners who are industry/vertical subject-matter experts to contribute articles.

Presently, affiliates provide their logos and, in the 2.0 version, incubators will provide their own branding information However, Venture Vortex personnel may do the actual upload and administering of this collateral.

Content Development

Content for the 2.0 build will be developed by Groundswell in collaboration with Venture Vortex's current ad hoc editorial process, which depends on the involvement of top-level management. As the site continues to grow, as the communities flourish through the network effect, as additional content is required for burgeoning subcommunities and as the user-contributed content multiplies exponentially, the time will come eventually when it will make sense to establish a more formal editorial process and possibly appoint an editorial board.

Voice, Tone, and Brand Discipline

As discussed in the Creative Brief, the voice and tone of the current site was designed to feel savvy, young, smart, and edgy. The high concept involved blending two styles: spare (clean, uncluttered, easy for busy people, fast) and "skatey" (young, 20-something, gen-Y, people who grew up on the web). This is changing and becoming a bit more buttoned-down as Venture Vortex begins to focus more on incubators and institutional investors as a revenue source.

As Venture Vortex becomes a multilayered community of community, the voice and tone of body copy and other text at the site will need to be tailored for specific sub-audiences. Based on the personas introduced in the Creative Brief as well as other background research about the major audience member types, the appropriate tones may be further specified:

- Venture Builder—fast-paced, technically savvy, concise and to the point, minimal spin. The Venture Builder considers himself (or herself) to be on the cutting edge of change and technology and would appreciate an equal level of experience from peers, from collaborators, and from the voice of the site itself.
- Venture Partner—While interested in benefiting from the technological revolution, Venture Partners are more interested in providing traditional services to start-ups that need to grow into thriving companies in record time. A Venture Partner sees this big opportunity, but does not consider him- or herself to be on the bleeding edge of technology. They would not resent having things spelled out a little more clearly when it comes to use of the site and provided tools. Venture Partners may range from small entrepreneurs and businesspeople to representatives of larger corporate entities. So we can't assume a corporate "Brooks Brothers" mindset. In other words, copy aimed at Venture Partners should communicate a sense of authority and expertise.
- Incubator—Incubators are entrepreneurs playing on a very large scale, Like Venture
 Builders, they are busy (in a hurry) and innovative. They regard themselves as
 authoritative, but they may not be as close to the ground with current technology. The
 Incubator entity may sometimes be represented by more administrative-level
 employees coming in to set things up for sponsored or referred Venture Builders. We
 expect incubators to be less interested in the nitty-gritty of many site features and

Groundswell Page 9

possibly less interested in networking through the communits. So the Incubator dashboard needs to feed key information to the Incubator user directly, and make the process of visiting the Venture Vortex site and checking up on incubees more efficient and painless. This will be a welcome addition to the Incubator's existing routine.

• Institutional Investors—Institutional Investors can be considered conservative both in the sense that Venture Partners are conservative (in that they are making their money "the old fashioned way") and in the sense that they are corporate entities prepared to spend large sums of money but not willing to waste time in role-playing or any overly involved process. Because these investors are by definition interested in start-ups and technology firms, they probably wouldn't be alienated by the tone of copy aimed at Venture Builders, but they should be expected not to participate substantially in the community features of the site.

There are some commonalities among all user types and copy that must serve multiple audiences or multiple purposes should stick to these common themes:

- Venture Vortex should communicate as a vibrant organization offering unvarnished information without the sense of endless vetting ones gets from older, more conservative sources of advice.
- Venture Vortex copy should avoid blandness and doubletalk. If something can
 be made plainer, more straightforward, or more concise, then it should be made
 so.

Editorial Roles

Content will continue to be created by in-house staff, freelancers, foundation partners, and syndicators. Venture Vortex employs several freelance message-board moderators. Both Garnet Heramen and Henry Harvey will participate in the development of content for the 2.0 version. Venture Vortex anticipates defining additional approval roles for the 2.0 site. These will need to be communicated to the technical team as soon as possible. Groundswell will work with Venture Vortex to codify a style guide to help discipline future editorial efforts.

In the near term, this level of attention to editorial will work, but as the site expands, the editorial process will need to be formalized in order to delegate the more routine aspects of content development (such as developmental editing, copyediting, technical review, proofreading).

Nomenclature

Subject to constraints of the user-interface and visual design, the nomenclature (a fancy word for terminology) used at the site should, above all:

- Communicate clearly.
- Call the user to transact at the site.
- Harmonize with the site's voice, tone, and branding.

Error Messages

Error messages must avoid blaming the user or citing meaningless code references. Instead they should where possible anticipate the intended action, and where necessary, politely guide the user to supply the needed information.

Migrating Content

Much content from the existing 1.0 site will migrate to the new site in some form. This includes:

- Content that migrates to the new site unchanged
- Content that undergoes slight editorial revision (tightening)
- Content that is repurposed and thus revised for the new purpose
- Content that is revised, updated, or changed by Venture Vortex (for example, the revised Roadmap)

New Content

Some of the content for the 2.0 site will depend upon new "collateral" (changed, amended, or partially updated material), in at least the following categories:

- · New Tutorials
- Updated Roadmap
- Static copy

Content Management

Analysis of the architecture of the current site and the market for content-management systems has led Groundswell to recommend building clean, simple administration tools and a new content repository around the existing database.

Venture Vortex requires the ability to delegate the task of changing content arbitrarily to nonsenior administrators with no "need to know" about the data structures.

Data Structure

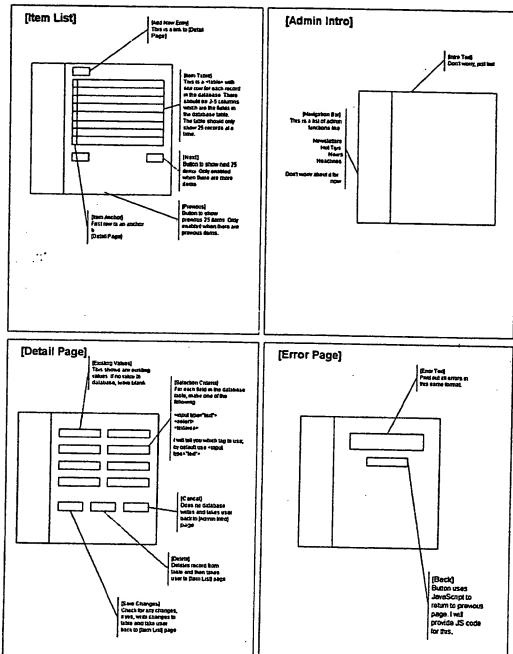
The 1.0 site includes both content in an MS SQL database (served by ColdFusion) and flat HTML content. In the 2.0 site, all content will be stored in the database, with minor exceptions. The new content repository will be built around the old database structure wherever possible, and will need to smoothly integrate content from the 1.0, 1.1, 1.5, and 2.0 versions of the site. The data structure will need to include fields for region and the ability to associate a user with a "private label" subcommunity.

Admin Tools

As discussed in the Creative Brief, to manage the content at the Venture Vortex 2.0 site, administrators will need to be able to perform the following actions:

- Create
- Edit
- Review
- Approve
- Stage
- Publish
- Remove
- Archive
- Manage syndicated content
- Moderate discussion
- Add partner logo
- Add incubator branding info.

This wireframe from the 2.0 site's preliminary technical architecture diagrams shows the intended admin-tool sequence:



Archiving Dated C ntent

Venture Vortex's admin tools should include the ability to archive old ("not the latest") newsletters and articles, automatically.

Managing Syndicated Content

The web interface for ScreamingMedia is cumbersome. Once a day, filtered articles are reviewed manually and then downloaded in the site's database, to be served dynamically at the site via ColdFusion. In developing the new site, Groundswell will make sure that the integration works at least as well after the cutover.

Workflow (Offline)

With the current editorial staffing and volume of content, Venture Vortex does not require automated workflow management (reminders and document control) or "refresh" timers. Workflow will be handled manually, offline. Any approval Venture Vortex needs for partner-generated content will be obtained offline as well.

Content Deployment

Once high-quality content has been created and developed, stored and managed, it still must be delivered to the appropriate audience members. As discussed in relation to the information architecture, this can be accomplished through user profiles based on subcommunity membership, region, industry/vertical, and other distinguishing characteristics. The incubator "private label" model will require rights management, as delineated in the Audience Rights document.

At this time there's no special need for "versioning" or the ability to roll back to an earlier version of the site.

Content Revision Plan (2.0)

Groundswell will manage the content-development process for the version 2.0 build, following these steps:

- 1. Complete detailed content inventory.
- 2. Write detailed editorial calendar (content matrix).
- 3. Develop and revise content.
- 4. Manage the editorial schedule (in parallel with step 3).
- 5. Deliver admin tools, documentation, and style guide.
- 6. Deliver guidelines for Incubators explaining how to set up their vRooms, in the form of a tutorial and help document.

Content Inventory

Venture Vortex and Groundswell have collaborated on a high-level content inventory detailing the major content types at the site, their storage format, volume, site version where content first appeared, creator, workflow needs, and refresh cycle. Please see the Venture Vortex High-Level Content Inventory document for further details.

Content Matrix/Editorial Calendar

The table below is a high-level content matrix. The next step is to itemize a complete content inventory keyed to the wire frames and develop a detailed editorial calendar. This content matrix specifies content by type, owner, and deadlines. Updated and changed content appears on two separate lines, as content ownership changes from Venture Vortex to Groundswell after the first draft.

Venture Vortex 2.0 High-Level Content Matrix

Type of content	Owner	Deadlines for launch		
		First	Second	Approval
Revised content	GS	11/6	11/13	11/17
New content collateral	VV	11/15		
Repurposed content	GS	11/13	11/16	11/22
New content	GS	11/25	12/1	12/3
Updated/changed content	VV	11/27		
Updated/changed content	GS	 	12/4	12/8

Note that the dates in this matrix are final dates for each category of content. The detailed editorial calendar will assign earlier interim due dates and milestone dates to some of the

sub-chunks of content, in order that writing, revising, and approval tasks not stack up unduly for any member of the team.

Dependencies

Whenever a team develops content at a rapid clip on a tight schedule, deadlines become critical. This section sets out the key deadlines for Groundswell and Venture Vortex and the risks associated with missing them. Deadline are listed here in reverse chronological order, backwards from the drop-dead point.

Groundswell Deadlines

- 1. All content tested by 1/1/1.
- 2. All content final by 12/8/0.
- 3. All content second drafts submitted by 12/4/0.
- 4. All new content first drafts submitted by 11/25/0.
- 5. All repurposed content submitted by 11/13/0.
- 6. All revised content submitted by 11/6/0.

Venture Vortex Deadlines

- 1. All content approved by 12/8/0.
- 2. All update/changed content first drafts submitted by 11/27/0.
- 3. All content first drafts reviewed by 11/22/0.
- 4. All new content collateral submitted by 11/15/0.

Risks

Missed deadlines may jeopardize the release schedule or require that the site relaunch with default copy in some locations (until final content can be substituted in). Content is well known to be the most likely bottleneck in the end and the easiest factor to underestimate in scope. It seems likely that some "version 1.5" content (content Venture Vortex is in the process of adding to the 1.0 site) won't be ready by 11/15. Plans should be made to add it to the 2.0 site after cutover.

Final Deliverables

Along with the delivery of the final site content, Groundswell will supply the following:

- 1. Tools to administer the content at the 2.0 site
- 2. Site documentation
- 3. A style guide
- 4. "Private Label" documentation for Incubators.

C ntent Management Administration Tools

As discussed in the "Content Management" section above, Groundswell will provide content management tools to help automate the addition, removal, and maintenance of content at the site.

Documentation

Groundswell will provide basic documentation for the administration of the 2.0 site.

Style Guide

Groundswell will turn over a draft style guide documenting the style choices made for the current site, so that Venture Vortex can maintain and update the guide as the site evolves.

Summary

Content strategy helps enforce brand discipline and manage content as the site continues to grow. These recommendations are specifically focused on the imminent build of the version 2.0 VentureVortex.com site, but they acknowledge the likely ambitious schedule of revised sites in the upcoming quarters and therefore apply (more generally) to future revisions as well.

Establishing the 2.0 Site

For the 2.0 version of its community site, Venture Vortex should:

- Employ an information architecture that maximizes value for the incubators and usability for Venture Builders.
- Continue with its current mix of content sources.
- Collaborate on content development for new and revised copy.
- Receive useful content-admin tools.
- Target content to subcommunities through user profiling.

Evolving Future Revisions

For upcoming revisions, the emphasis will likely shift to developing, packaging, and integrating additional Venture Vortex subcommunities, whether they are of the "common site," fishbowl variety or more akin to the "private label," sponsored Incubator sites. Some applications of this strategy that should ease the difficulties associated with handling ever-increasing content, include the following:

- Maintain and build on the established information architecture, modifying it carefully and gradually using insights from content administrators.
- Multiply the content sources, including additional syndicators, columnists
 (possibly from the ranks of the community), third-party feature writers, additional
 newsletters, content from additional partners and affiliates, incubator content,
 "cream of the crop" content from message boards, and possibly even free
 memberships for volunteer community hosts.
- When the content volume grows to between four and ten times the current volume, establish an editorial board, define specific editorial roles, delegate routine tasks, and automate the process workflow.
- Give feedback on admin tools and develop iterative updates, including such features as an automated content repurposer, as could be used to more easily execute a "quote of the day" feature at the site.
- Make profiles more fine-grained to enable Venture Vortex to learn more about a user from the user's interaction "trail" recorded in the site's logs.